

[East Valley Tribune](#)

Harry Mitchell

We have a children's health care crisis in our country. The numbers are staggering: 9 million children, including 250,000 here in Arizona, do not have access to health insurance.

As a father, grandfather and former teacher who has seen first-hand the consequences of children without adequate health care, I believe we have a moral responsibility to solve this crisis. This is an important issue and worthy of honest debate.

The [State Children's Health Insurance Program](#) provides funding for states to decide how to best address local health care needs. In Arizona, SCHIP funds KidsCare, which currently ensures that 65,000 of Arizona's poorest children receive health care in the doctor's office instead of the emergency room.

I recently voted for, and Congress passed, bipartisan legislation to make that possible for 4 million more of the nation's 9 million uninsured children. It doesn't solve the crisis, but it is an important step forward. Here in Arizona, it means 81,000 more children would be covered through KidsCare. Unfortunately, the president defied calls from Republicans and Democrats alike, [vetoed the bill](#) and put those children at risk.

In recent weeks, children's health care opponents have used misleading information to scare others into falsely believing that Republicans and Democrats are working to shift upper middle-class children from private insurance to SCHIP.

This kind of misinformation has become widespread.

One of my colleagues, speaking on the House floor, inaccurately claimed that every new child covered through SCHIP would drop his or her private insurance. Specifically, my colleague said the bipartisan bill "will produce one person dropping private insurance for every one person who gets SCHIP insurance."

But that's simply not true. Earlier this month, I told a Valley newspaper that the false claim was a "phony argument" and "scare tactic." I stand by my words.

Just a few days ago, former state Sen. Tom Patterson wrote in the Tribune that "the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office calculates that at least half of the new beneficiaries of an expanded SCHIP would be families who are currently insured."

But that's not accurate, either. While his mistake may have been unintentional, Patterson seriously misrepresented the [report](#). According to the CBO, whose [report](#) is available for the public at www.cbo.gov

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SCHIP legislation provides the resources to extend coverage to 4 million children who would otherwise go uninsured by 2012. About 3.5 million of these children already meet the states' current SCHIP coverage criteria.

As public servants, I believe we have an obligation to help inform as well as advocate, and the use of inaccurate and misleading information does not contribute to an open and honest debate. I believe, as do the vast majority of my constituents, that ensuring these 4 million children have access to health care is a much-needed and worthwhile investment.

As a teacher, I saw how children without adequate health care miss too many days of school because of illness. Children who miss too many classes are the most likely to drop out, and those who drop out are less likely to contribute to our economy, and more likely to commit crimes. Over time, that makes our neighborhoods less safe, and places an even heavier burden on taxpayers.

Some SCHIP opponents continue to accept government-supported health care for themselves, have voted to give themselves pay raises, and even delivered billions and billions of dollars in corporate welfare to the Big Oil industry. Yet, they actively work to deny health insurance to Arizona's poorest children. I believe that is wrong.

I will continue to work with Republicans and Democrats alike to solve this health care crisis and put Arizona's children first.